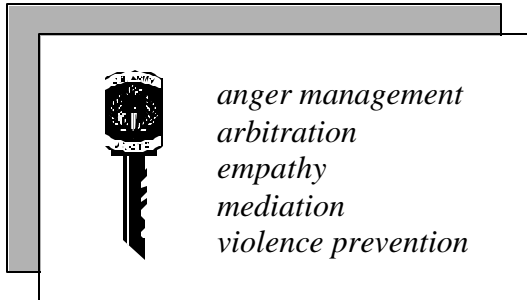


LESSON 3: FINDING SOLUTIONS: MEDIATION



INTRODUCTION

National Center for Education Statistics report that approximately 37% of high school students have been in a physical fight within the year and 18% of high school students have carried a weapon at least once within the past 30 days. These alarming statistics illustrate the fact that the instances of violence have become all too common in our schools. Safety has become a primary concern, in what is supposed to be a non-threatening learning environment.

One of the best ways to handle the violence in schools and prevent its spread throughout the community is to defuse disputes, and resolve the conflict before it turns violent.

In Lesson 1, you learned a six-step process to effectively manage conflict and negotiate a fair solution; however, what if the negotiation is unsuccessful, and you cannot reach an agreement to settle the conflict? What other steps can you take to prevent a conflict from escalating to violence?

In this lesson, you will learn how you can take personal responsibility for **violence prevention** by:

- Practicing **anger management** techniques to control your emotions and help you resolve conflicts in a calm, rational manner.
- Acting as a peer mediator to help others resolve conflicts in a non-violent manner

ANGER MANAGEMENT

Anger is normal, and a universal emotion that everyone experiences from time to time. When you are angry, you experience strong feelings that can propel you into inappropriate or destructive behavior. Anger, if left unchecked, can easily spiral out of control and lead to violence.

Your response to anger, however, is completely within your control. Mastering the techniques of anger management will help you to keep calm in a tense situation, and avoid violence.

ANGER MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

- Take time to calm down. We need to maintain emotional control in order to communicate in a calm, even tone. Yelling and insulting will only serve to worsen the situation.
- Identify the source of your anger, and know what triggers it.
- Use words to describe your needs and explain your feelings.
- Turn your anger into energy. You could: exercise vigorously, write down what is making you angry, daydream about things that make you happy, do something useful for yourself or for someone else, pound or yell into a pillow, or blow up a balloon. (Keep a list of the things that you can do at different times so you do not have to think about what to do when you become angry.)

- Share your angry feelings with a friend, teacher, parent, coach, counselor, or clergy. This always proves to be an excellent antidote.

Anger management skills must be practiced throughout your lifetime. Once you have gained control over your anger, you can work toward resolving conflict in a non-violent way.

MEDIATION

What would happen if you tried to resolve a conflict yet could not brainstorm any solutions that were acceptable to both parties? Or if the emotions became overheated, to the point where you could no longer continue negotiations? If you fail to resolve a conflict, through negotiation, as discussed in Lesson 1, the conflict may need to be resolved through mediation or arbitration. Mediation, from the Latin word meaning “middle,” literally means putting another person in the middle of the dispute. The mediator is an independent third party that acts as a facilitator, and can be another student. In fact, studies show that peer mediation programs, where students are trained to resolve disputes of other students, have proven to be relatively successful. The goal of mediation is to help the disputing parties find and agree on a win-win solution in which each party’s needs are met.

Mediation is usually contrasted with **arbitration**, which should be used as a last resort. Arbitration is the submission of a conflict to a disinterested third party, an adult such as a teacher or principal, who makes a final and binding judgment to decide who is right. Typically, arbitration leaves at least one person with anger about the decision and resentment toward the arbitrator. However, both people involved in the conflict should abide by the decision made by the arbitrator, and agree to “let go of the conflict” with no hard feelings toward either person.

ROLE OF A MEDIATOR

A mediator facilitates a discussion between the parties with the dispute, by asking open-ended questions that will encourage a discussion of solutions. Unlike an arbitrator, mediators will not issue orders, find fault, investigate, impose a solution, or make decisions for the parties. Mediators try to help the people with a dispute reach their own agreement, and achieve practical, sustainable resolutions. However, a mediator cannot enforce agreements once they have been reached. It is up to all parties to enforce and implement their own agreements.

As a rule, mediators should:

- Be honest
- Remain objective
- Act in good faith
- Show **empathy**, but avoid becoming emotional
- Use good communication skills
- Listen effectively
- Summarize accurately
- Think critically

As with any conflict situation, mediators should not get involved in a heated argument that has the potential for turning violent at any moment.

STEPS TO MEDIATING A CONFLICT

Have you ever helped two friends reach an agreement, or helped to settle an argument between siblings? If so, you have mediated a conflict. Mediation is a simple, straightforward process. The procedure for a successful mediation is outlined below:

1. Introductions

- Explain the mediator's role
- Mediator emphasizes neutrality
- Establish the ground rules such as: confidentiality, respect, no name-calling or vulgar language, no interruptions, etc.
- Explain the steps of a mediation
- Ask for questions

2. Tell the story

- Both parties tell their side of the story to the mediator
- Mediator summarizes each party's point of view including facts and feelings
- Mediator makes sure that each party understands the conflict

3. Explore possible solutions

- Ask both parties how they can solve the problem
- Write down all solutions
- Check off only those solutions that both parties can agree to

4. Don't give up

- Keep trying until you can reach an agreement. You may have to trade something that one side wants for something that the other side has.
- Ask the parties to write down the agreement in their own words
- Ask all parties to sign the agreement

ROLE OF A BYSTANDER

Even if you are not personally involved in the conflict as one of the disputing parties or the mediator, you have a responsibility to do your part to prevent violence by:

- Refusing to spread rumors
- Refusing to relay threats or insults to others
- Staying away from potential fight scenes
- Showing respect for people who use good judgment in ignoring insults or other trivial forms of conflict

Appeal to your peers to help control a situation, and reduce the potential for violence.

CONCLUSION

We all have a responsibility to try to resolve conflicts in a productive and non-violent way. When a conflict occurs, try, first, to negotiate a resolution. If that fails, involve a classmate or teacher to mediate the conflict. By negotiating and/or mediating conflicts, you are developing valuable anger management, problem-solving, and conflict resolution skills that you will use throughout your life.